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# The Classical Weekly

VOL. XVI, No. 1

MONDAY, OCTOBER 2, 1922

WHOLE No. 424

## PROFESSOR MATHER ON COLLEGE EDUCATION

In *The Unpartisan Review* 14.271-289 (October-December, 1920), there was an article entitled *Aims in College Education*, by Professor Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., of Princeton University. There is much in the article that students and teachers of the Classics should take to heart. As a preliminary to his discussion, Professor Mather describes, briefly, his own career. He was at first a teacher of English literature in elective courses at Williams College, then teacher of collegiate French. Wearying of such work, he "escaped into New York journalism". After ten years of such freedom, for some unnamed reason he accepted a professorship in art at Princeton, "retaining certain journalistic relations".

The total impression he has gained from fourteen years of college teaching is "cheerful, rather than satisfactory".

... I have found that a faithful professor may hope to do much good to a few students, that he may so conduct himself as to do no palpable harm to the rest. ... My first misgivings as to the results of collegiate education came in newspaper days when I met familiarly hundreds of college alumni. As a class they seemed to me to possess, in Matthew Arnold's fine sense, only the barbaric virtues. They were well-groomed, forthright, effective, companionable men, but quite indifferent to the things of the mind. ... Many college graduates could get cheaply and swiftly at Plattsburg or its equivalent the moral and social training which at college requires four years of time and some thousands of dollars. So for years I have felt that while the colleges were doing good, they were doing so with enormous wastefulness of effort on the part of the faculty, of time on the part of the student, and of money on the part of parents and trustees.

The trouble, (273), is

lack of a central aim. We do not know what we should teach our students, nor yet what may be reasonably expected of them after they have been taught. ... Our college degrees imply absolutely nothing about the knowledge possessed by their holders.

On the other hand (274), on the part of a Spanish or Italian professor or bachelor of arts or what not, there would be no such feeling.

... Every bachelor of arts, letters or sciences would possess respectively much the same body of knowledge. ... The State sees to it that he does know what he has studied, by subjecting him to thorough and comprehensive examinations before giving him his degree. ... Three standard degrees correspond to three distinct trainings, in the humanities including classics, in the newer humanities, and in mathematics and science. ... Without being specifically vocational, the European collegiate education admirably meets the needs of the vocations. In comparison our system is an anarchy.

Professor Mather would not have us imitate, wholesale, the European plan. "We should rather seek an equal clarity of aims and efficiency of methods along the line of our own tradition and needs". We can learn easily enough what our students know, or do not know, by adding to the examinations on courses broader examinations on entire subjects. "We are the only civilized nation that does not impose such tests. ...". We need next to develop a system of collegiate education based on coherent ideals. Students who do not take their collegiate work seriously "show an extraordinary industry and contentment in officers' camps, ensign schools, and in the professional schools generally".

The ideal of making a gentleman is in itself, says Professor Mather, an ideal not to be decried. "Oxford and Cambridge have long given it countenance in that merciful dispensation known as the Pass Degree". But between English Universities and American Universities there is this great difference: the English Universities graduate not merely pass men, but honor men as well, and they regard the latter, not the former, as their jewels; our College graduates, with negligible exceptions, are pass men only. Professor Mather, therefore, warmly advocates the establishment of Honor Schools, such as "Harvard has recently instituted, and Princeton and Columbia have attempted organizing". The ideal represented by such Honor Schools, and the idea represented by "the students themselves, the alumni, most trustees", that the business of a College is the making of a gentleman, must in some way be reconciled. Let us concede, he says, that, while four years spent mostly in rubbing one's shoulder against College walls is an unjustifiable waste of time, two years might profitably so be spent. This would then give the undergraduate two years under the old system, to loaf and invite his soul; thereafter the Faculty might require him to invite his mind.

The most formidable foe, however, to College education Professor Mather finds to be vocationalism. The vocational idea in itself is good, because most people must take short cuts to their work in the world.

... But the moment the liberal college engages to provide such short cuts, it is untrue to its genius, challenges impossible competitions, and imperils its very existence. As a matter of fact the vocational pressure is constant. ... In various ways all the colleges are yielding to this pressure. Having no clear idea of what is necessary for all liberally educated young men, the college, as represented by dean or advisor, particularizes the problem—discovers that the student is headed towards law or medicine or banking, and prescribes jurisprudence, biology or finance. From the point of view of one who believes in liberal education, this is a homeopathic heresy of

the rankest sort. What the lawyer really needs to quicken his imagination and liberate him from his shop, is letters, science, mathematics; what the budding doctor really needs is letters, art, history, and the unbiological sciences; what the prospective banker needs is letters, history, art, and science. To admit any other theory is eventually to undermine the colleges and to debase the learned professions themselves. Since Plato's time until yesterday, nobody has questioned that the business of liberal education is precisely to furnish the information and inspiration that the vocational life is unlikely to afford. If this be not true, the college has little excuse for being. . . . We professors are playing the vocationalist's game today, not from conviction, but because we have no equally clear formula to oppose to his.

As an offset to the ideal of the vocationalist, Professor Mather sees only one competing ideal to-day—that of social service; he finds it an unsatisfactory ideal. This matter he discusses in a very interesting paragraph which, however, there is not space to quote.

Professor Mather believes that the finer ideal which he has had in mind from the start does in fact still exist, that it is only temporarily obscured, and may yet be recovered. With this declaration, he turns to the constructive part of his paper (280-287).

I feel that we shall get nowhere until we admit with complete candor that a liberal education is a luxury. Such it has always been, such it remains. It is properly accessible only to a few who command either exceptional leisure or exceptional abilities. The college does its peculiar work alongside a dozen other equally worthy educational institutions, mostly vocational. It does not compete with them, it directly supplements them and incidentally aids them. It has its own aims, which are not immediately practical, vocational or material.

The aim, then, of the College should be orientation, and orientation alone. It should aim to give the student his bearing, to sketch vividly for him the high roads of mental endeavor, and to help him to find his own place and path. To do this, "we must first know ourselves what has been central in past thought, and what promises centrality in the future". What Professor Mather has in mind has been admirably set forth, he says, "by the best educated man I have ever been privileged to know—the late John La Farge":

The noblest of all the gifts of the great institutions of learning is a certain fostering of elevation of mind. It is not so much by what he knows that the man brought under the trainings of the great academies is marked; it is by his acquaintance with the size of knowledge; with, if I may say so, the impossibility of completing its full circle; with the acquaintance of the manner of enlarging his boundaries; with the respect for other knowledge than his own; with a certain relative humility as compared with the narrower pride of him who knows not the size of the spaces of the world of knowledge.

Professor Mather believes that the American College, down to the Civil War or thereabouts, clearly had this ideal as its main purpose—orientation and orientation alone. The loss of this old ideal he seems to charge especially to President Eliot, whom he describes as "the great romantic", when he "persuaded us that the student was properly the captain of his own academic

fate". Later, in an effort to make the elective system "fool proof", President Gilman, at The Johns Hopkins University, worked out the group system, "the classic compromise between the Wayland-Eliot formula of free election and the old ideal of a well-balanced, imposed curriculum". But the panacea has failed to work: "students are no more intelligently choosing groups than they did single courses". The group system was based on a fundamental fallacy, that the student at eighteen or nineteen has clearly marked intellectual preferences for one or another set of studies; "only a small minority have such preferences and many have a wholesome aversion to all study whatsoever". Only a small minority of College men have a sufficiently clear view of their future vocation to choose the groups of studies intelligently. The group system further assumes that a student is likely to follow some branch of graduate study, and the courses are mostly conducted on that false expectation.

We classicists should read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the following paragraph:

Here we touch an essential issue of spirit and aims in teaching. A Latinist needs to know Latin in a way that ill befits a mere gentleman. The introduction to physics that is right for a physicist may be quite wrong for a layman. At all points this difference of needs between the future specialist and the generally educated man holds good. Let me illustrate. Undergraduate physics left me intellectually unscathed. But a few years ago I saw Dean Magie repeat with Joseph Henry's crude apparatus the fundamental experiments in electrical induction. There, with the pickle pots borrowed from Mrs. Henry's pantry, and wire insulated with strips from her discarded dresses, I saw a great principle triumphantly demonstrated. It was the most genuinely educational hour I have ever spent in the scientific field. It put before me the whole struggle to wrest from nature her essential and abiding truths. It once for all humanized what I, with the philistinism of the student of art, had imagined to be a somewhat inhuman pursuit. Now it seems to me from the point of view of general education it is far more important that the student of physics should grasp the quality of the endeavor of Galileo, Newton, Faraday and Helmholtz than it is for him to memorize the latest formulation of the ionic theory or the newest lore concerning the alpha and beta particle. And in my own field it is more valuable for the student to sense the creative endeavor of a Giotto, a Leonardo da Vinci, a Rembrandt or a Rubens, than it is to cope in the first instance with the latter day vorticists and synchronists.

In his final paragraph, Professor Mather points out that part of the confusion in collegiate education has come from the mistaken notion that there are many more needs in a body of two thousand students than there were among two hundred.

The great divisions of knowledge have not changed since Aristotle, ten thousand young men represent no more needed types of education than do one hundred. Indeed their need to cultivate a certain elevation of mind and to acquaint themselves with the best that has been thought and said and done in the world, is absolutely uniform. We have largely turned over to their untrained judgment the choice of a path towards this end, and they are wandering in confusion. The moment requires that faculties resume their duty of leadership. It is our task to choose the most eligible

knowledge for our students, and their part to trust our judgment. They will do so when we show ourselves capable of that act of selection and criticism which underlies all education. They will welcome required courses which are complete and informing in themselves, and not merely prerequisite to special study. They will respond to instruction, which, whether on the literary or scientific side, is humanistic and exemplary of great historic and personal endeavors.

What a fine thing for education it would be, if the men who are controlling, or at least seem to control, the destinies of education in our great country, would take to heart, as their guiding principles, not only for collegiate education, but for education in the High Schools as well, the ideas set forth by Professor Mather in this most interesting and suggestive paper.

C. K.

### THE FOLK CALENDAR OF TIMES AND SEASONS<sup>1</sup>

In THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY 14. 89-93, 97-100, I collected instances of weather prognostics derived from the actions of birds, beasts, fish, and insects<sup>2</sup>. The present paper aims to complete a study of the weather lore of animals<sup>3</sup> by noting their associations with times and seasons.

Aristophanes, Aves 709, makes the birds say: 'We first show the signs of the season, spring, winter, and autumn'. Of similar purport is Jeremiah 8.7: 'Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming'. "Part, more wise, . . . wedge their way intelligent of seasons", sings Milton of the birds, in Paradise Lost 7. 425-427. A well-known American ornithologist writes that "to the lover of Nature, birds are a living calendar"<sup>4</sup>.

Doubtless the arrival and the departure of birds were far more dependable indications of the season than was the calendar so long as entire months had to be intercalated. The peasantry would naturally continue the use of the ornithological calendar even after the new-fangled human device had been improved<sup>5</sup>.

#### SPRING

No bird is more closely associated with the advent of a new season than is the swallow, the *avant-coureur* of spring. In Rhodes every year the arrival of this bird was celebrated by children who went the rounds of the houses singing the song which begins, 'The swallow, the swallow is come, bringing good seasons and a joyful time'<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>The following abbreviations are used in this paper: Abbott = G. F. Abbott, Macedonian Folklore; Ael. = Aelianus, De Natura Animalium; Ar. = Aratus, Prognostica, as appended to the Phaenomena and numbered consecutively with it; Ar. Aves = Aristophanes, Aves; Geopon. = Geoponica; Hesiod = Hesiod, Works and Days; Pl. = Plinius, Naturalis Historia; Th. = Theophrastus, De Signis; Bergk = Bergk, Poetae Lyrici Graeci. <sup>2</sup>See also Professor A. S. Pease's annotations on Cicero, De Divinatione, Liber Primus, University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, 6. 79-80, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup>The word *animals* is used in the Latin sense.

<sup>4</sup>Chapman, Birds of Eastern North America, 5.

<sup>5</sup>"Time among the Macedonian peasantry is measured not so much by the conventional calendar as by the labours and festivals which are proper to the various seasons of the year" Abbott, 11.

In this connection readers will recall a vase-painting which is reproduced in Schreiber, Atlas of Classical Antiquities, Plate LXIV<sup>7</sup>. On it is depicted a young man who, as he catches sight of a swallow, exclaims, 'Look, a swallow!'. An older man turns and answers, 'Yes, by Heracles!'. On the right a boy glances upward and says, 'Spring's already here'. The animation and excitement of the group show that it is no small event in their lives. Such scenes must have been common in Greece, as we can readily infer from Aristophanes, Equites 419, 'Look, lads, don't you see? The new season, a swallow!'<sup>8</sup>.

The swallow tells when it is time to sell heavy winter robes and to acquire lighter dress (Ar. Aves 714-715). Pliny says (18.237) that the first appearance of the swallow is eight days before the Kalends of March. We may infer from a Greek proverb that an occasional swallow missed its cue and came upon the scene too soon: 'One swallow does not make a spring'<sup>9</sup>. Babrius (131) does in fact tell us of a swallow which appeared out of season. The Greek proverb has a numerous progeny: e. g. in French, Une hirondelle ne fait pas le printemps; in Italian, Una rondine non fa l'estate; in Spanish (Don Quixote), Una golondrina sola no hace verano; 'One swallow doesn't make a summer'<sup>10</sup>.

In our own country the robin seems to have the place of the swallow in Greece: compare Lowell, My Study Windows, "The return of the robin is commonly announced by the newspapers, like that of eminent or notorious people to a watering-place, as the first authentic notification of spring".

Professor E. W. Martin, The Birds of the Latin Poets, 223, has collected some poetic references to the robin as a bird of spring: "The robin the forerunner of spring" (Longfellow); "I hear the whispering voice of Spring, The thrush's trill, the robin's cry" (Holmes); "The robins are come again with tender melodious note" (Mace)<sup>11</sup>.

Sooner than other birds came the cuckoo proclaiming spring (Dionysius, De Avibus 1.13)<sup>12</sup>. From the

<sup>7</sup>Athenaeus 8.360 C. For references to modern swallow-songs, see Thompson, A Glossary of Greek Birds, 189; Hastings, Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, 1.528; Abbott, 18-19.

<sup>8</sup>A picture is to be found also in Baumeister, Denkmäler des Klassischen Altertums, 3.1985, and in Jane Harrison, Themis, 98.

<sup>9</sup>Compare Christina G. Rossetti, A Bird Song, 812: "It's surely summer, for there's a swallow: Come one swallow, his mate will follow. The bird race quicken and wheel and thicken".

<sup>10</sup>Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 1.7.16: "There seem to be lacking not a few swallows". Ar. Aves 1417. For other references to the swallow and spring, see Hesiod 568; Simonides 74 (Bergk); Aristophanes, Pax 800, Aves 714, Thesmophoriazousae 1; Ael. 1.52; Anthologia Palatina 10.14.5; Varro apud Augustinum, De Musica 4.15; Cicero, Ad Atticum 9.18.3, 10.2.1; Horace, Epist. 1.7.13, Carm. 4.12.1; Calpurnius, Ecl. 5.16-17; Ovid, Fasti 1.157-158, 2. 853; Pl. 2.122; Columella 10.80; Pervigilium Veneris, ad finem.

<sup>11</sup>Compare the current Macedonian saying, 'One cuckoo does not make a spring': Abbott, 10.

<sup>12</sup>In America the bluebird shares with the robin the honor of announcing spring. Professor Martin also cites the following passages, the first from Longfellow, the next two from Bryant, the fourth from Emerson: "And from the stately elms I hear The bluebird prophesying Spring"; "And bluebirds in the misty spring Of cloudless skies and summer sing"; "The bluebird chants, from the elm's long branches, A hymn to welcome the budding year"; "Sparrows far off, and nearer April's bird Blue-coated flying before from tree to tree". In The Biglow Papers Lowell calls the bobolink "June's bridesman, poet of the year". <For a review of Professor Martin's book, by Professor W. B. McDaniel, see THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY 10.143-144. C. K.>

<sup>13</sup>Compare Aristotle, Historia Animalium 9.49 B; Ael. 3.30, ad finem.